



## Family-run Dairy Now Certified to Export



Photo: USAID/Jan Howard

“It really is worth the trouble to do things well. I have a product that I know people want. It’s a product that I am proud to put my name on because the quality of my product will match any competition.”

- Ulises Gonzalez, Dairy Owner

Ulises Gonzalez and his sister, Martha Justina Gonzalez, own a dairy known locally as Lácteos Santa Martha in the mountainous northern region of Nicaragua. He is the general manager while she runs the laboratory and monitors produce quality. The business, which was originally run out of a converted garage at the family home, was nearly lost due to the destruction of Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Farms that provided raw milk were flooded and roads that connected the area to principal markets were washed out.

USAID provided assistance to many farmers and helped them not only recover their dairies, but improve them. USAID helped Lácteos Santa Martha address hygiene, quality control, and processing methods. The Gonzalez family made radical changes to its cheese production which included replacing wood equipment with hygienic stainless steel, purchasing new machinery such as pasteurization equipment, and improved monitoring quality. The upgraded production process earned Lácteos Santa Martha an international prize for quality and packaging of its dairy products.

The Gonzalez family secured a loan to build a new processing plant which has enabled them to increase production and sales. The family-run business is the first Nicaraguan dairy processing plant to receive U.S. FDA certification to export its products to the United States. With the certification and continued assistance from USAID, Lácteos Santa Martha secured a buyer and is exporting 4,000 lbs. of cheese and other dairy products weekly to the U.S. Recently, another U.S. buyer agreed to import 20,000 lbs. of dry cheese monthly from the Gonzalez family.

First Person

